

# EMANCIPATION HALL: A TRIBUTE TO THE SLAVES WHO HELPED BUILD THE U.S. CAPITOL

---

(110-71)

## HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON

TRANSPORTATION AND

INFRASTRUCTURE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

---

SEPTEMBER 25, 2007

---

Printed for the use of the  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure



U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

38-171 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2007

---

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office  
Internet: bookstore.gpo.gov Phone: toll free (866) 512-1800; DC area (202) 512-1800  
Fax: (202) 512-2104 Mail: Stop IDCC, Washington, DC 20402-0001

## COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

JAMES L. OBERSTAR, Minnesota, *Chairman*

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>NICK J. RAHALL, II, West Virginia, <i>Vice Chair</i><br/>           PETER A. DeFAZIO, Oregon<br/>           JERRY F. COSTELLO, Illinois<br/>           ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON, District of Columbia<br/>           JERROLD NADLER, New York<br/>           CORRINE BROWN, Florida<br/>           BOB FILNER, California<br/>           EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON, Texas<br/>           GENE TAYLOR, Mississippi<br/>           ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS, Maryland<br/>           ELLEN O. TAUSCHER, California<br/>           LEONARD L. BOSWELL, Iowa<br/>           TIM HOLDEN, Pennsylvania<br/>           BRIAN BAIRD, Washington<br/>           RICK LARSEN, Washington<br/>           MICHAEL E. CAPUANO, Massachusetts<br/>           JULIA CARSON, Indiana<br/>           TIMOTHY H. BISHOP, New York<br/>           MICHAEL H. MICHAUD, Maine<br/>           BRIAN HIGGINS, New York<br/>           RUSS CARNAHAN, Missouri<br/>           JOHN T. SALAZAR, Colorado<br/>           GRACE F. NAPOLITANO, California<br/>           DANIEL LIPINSKI, Illinois<br/>           DORIS O. MATSUI, California<br/>           NICK LAMPSON, Texas<br/>           ZACHARY T. SPACE, Ohio<br/>           MAZIE K. HIRONO, Hawaii<br/>           BRUCE L. BRALEY, Iowa<br/>           JASON ALTMIRE, Pennsylvania<br/>           TIMOTHY J. WALZ, Minnesota<br/>           HEATH SHULER, North Carolina<br/>           MICHAEL A. ACURI, New York<br/>           HARRY E. MITCHELL, Arizona<br/>           CHRISTOPHER P. CARNEY, Pennsylvania<br/>           JOHN J. HALL, New York<br/>           STEVE KAGEN, Wisconsin<br/>           STEVE COHEN, Tennessee<br/>           JERRY McNERNEY, California<br/>           LAURA A. RICHARDSON, California</p> | <p>JOHN L. MICA, Florida<br/>           DON YOUNG, Alaska<br/>           THOMAS E. PETRI, Wisconsin<br/>           HOWARD COBLE, North Carolina<br/>           JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR., Tennessee<br/>           WAYNE T. GILCHREST, Maryland<br/>           VERNON J. EHLERS, Michigan<br/>           STEVEN C. LATOURETTE, Ohio<br/>           RICHARD H. BAKER, Louisiana<br/>           FRANK A. LOBIONDO, New Jersey<br/>           JERRY MORAN, Kansas<br/>           GARY G. MILLER, California<br/>           ROBIN HAYES, North Carolina<br/>           HENRY E. BROWN, JR., South Carolina<br/>           TIMOTHY V. JOHNSON, Illinois<br/>           TODD RUSSELL PLATTS, Pennsylvania<br/>           SAM GRAVES, Missouri<br/>           BILL SHUSTER, Pennsylvania<br/>           JOHN BOOZMAN, Arkansas<br/>           SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, West Virginia<br/>           JIM GERLACH, Pennsylvania<br/>           MARIO DIAZ-BALART, Florida<br/>           CHARLES W. DENT, Pennsylvania<br/>           TED POE, Texas<br/>           DAVID G. REICHERT, Washington<br/>           CONNIE MACK, Florida<br/>           JOHN R. 'RANDY' KUHL, JR., New York<br/>           LYNN A. WESTMORELAND, Georgia<br/>           CHARLES W. BOUSTANY, JR., Louisiana<br/>           JEAN SCHMIDT, Ohio<br/>           CANDICE S. MILLER, Michigan<br/>           THELMA D. DRAKE, Virginia<br/>           MARY FALLIN, Oklahoma<br/>           VERN BUCHANAN, Florida</p> |
|--|---|

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND EMERGENCY  
MANAGEMENT

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON, District of Columbia, *Chairwoman*

MICHAEL H. MICHAUD, Maine

JASON ALTMIRE, Pennsylvania

MICHAEL A. ARCURI, New York

CHRISTOPHER P. CARNEY, Pennsylvania,

*Vice Chair*

TIMOTHY J. WALZ, Minnesota

STEVE COHEN, Tennessee

JAMES L. OBERSTAR, Minnesota

*(Ex Officio)*

SAM GRAVES, Missouri

BILL SHUSTER, Pennsylvania

SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, West Virginia

CHARLES W. DENT, Pennsylvania

JOHN R. 'RANDY' KUHL, JR., New York

JOHN L. MICA, Florida

*(Ex Officio)*



| CONTENTS  |  | Page |
|---|--|------|
| Summary of Subject Matter .....   |  | vi   |
| TESTIMONY   |  |      |
| Wamp, Hon. Zach, a Representative in Congress from the State of Tennessee .             |  | 7    |
| Jackson, Jr., Hon. Jesse, a Representative in Congress from the State of Illinois ..... |  | 7    |
| PREPARED STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS                                     |  |      |
| Cohen, Hon. Steve, of Tennessee .....   |  | 16   |
| Jackson, Jr., Hon. Jesse L., of Illinois .....  |  | 17   |
| Norton, Hon. Eleanor Holmes, of the District of Columbia .....                          |  | 19   |
| Wamp, Hon. Zach, of Tennessee .....   |  | 21   |



**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

**James L. Oberstar**  
**Chairman**

**John L. Mica**  
**Ranking Republican Member**

David Heymsfeld, Chief of Staff  
Ward W. McCarragher, Chief Counsel

September 21, 2007

James W. Cook II, Republican Chief of Staff

**SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER**

**TO:** Members of the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management

**FROM:** Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management Staff

**SUBJECT:** Hearing on H.R. 3315, a bill to name the great hall of the Capitol Visitor Center "Emancipation Hall"

**PURPOSE OF THE HEARING**

On Tuesday, September 25, 2007, at 2:00 p.m., in room 2253 Rayburn House Office Building, the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management will receive testimony from the sponsors of H.R. 3315, a bill to name the great hall at the Capitol Visitor Center as "Emancipation Hall".

**BACKGROUND**

More than three million people visit the United States Capitol on an annual basis. In 1991, Congress provided funds for the conceptual design and planning of a Capitol Visitors Center ("CVC"). In 1993, the Capitol Preservation Commission allocated funds to carry the conceptual study into an actual design document.

On July 24, 1998, Russell Weston, Jr. burst through a security checkpoint entrance on the eastern front of the Capitol and opened fire, killing the two Capitol Police officers and wounding several others. Soon after the shooting, Congress appropriated funds for a visitor's center to increase security within the Capitol, and to provide a safer environment for visitors awaiting tours of the Capitol. The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the subsequent discovery of anthrax in congressional office buildings in October 2001 highlighted concerns regarding the potential vulnerabilities of the Capitol and the need for improved security on Capitol Hill.

The CVC project has been beset with completion delays and cost overruns. Congress initially appropriated \$100 million for the project. However, today, the CVC is expected to cost well over \$500 million.

The new CVC is expected to be completed in the fall of 2008. This Center encompasses 580,000 square feet of space on three levels above and below ground. The footprint is approximately five acres, which is about 193,000 square feet, and is larger than the foot print of the Capitol itself. The CVC will include a great hall that will include information and ticketing desks, as well as provide a generous waiting area. In addition, there will be also an exhibition gallery, two orientation theaters, a new dining cafeteria with capacity for 550 people, two gift shops, 26 restrooms, and a 1,000 foot linear tunnel for truck loading and delivery. The overall project budget is \$548 million.

H.R. 3315 is a bill to designate the great hall of the CVC as Emancipation Hall. Representative Wamp introduced this bill on August 2, 2007, with 227 original co-sponsors.

#### **PRIOR LEGISLATIVE AND OVERSIGHT ACTIVITY**

The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure has jurisdiction over designation of public spaces in the U.S. Capitol. The Subcommittee has not held legislative hearings specifically dedicated to naming the great hall but has conducted ongoing oversight over the CVC project. Most recently, on June 8, 2007, the Subcommittee held a hearing on "What Visitors Can Expect at the Capitol Visitors Center: Transportation, Access, Security and Visuals".

#### **WITNESSES**

**The Honorable Jesse Jackson, Jr.**  
Member of Congress  
(IL-02)

**The Honorable Zach Wamp**  
Member of Congress  
(TN-03)





## EMANCIPATION HALL: A TRIBUTE TO THE SLAVES WHO HELPED BUILD THE U.S. CAP- ITOL

---

Tuesday, September 25, 2007

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC  
BUILDINGS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT,  
*Washington, DC.*

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 2:05 p.m., in Room 2253, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Eleanor Holmes Norton [Chairman of the Subcommittee] Presiding.

Ms. NORTON. I am very pleased to welcome to today's hearing Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr., and Congressman Zach Wamp, who are key sponsors of the resolution to name the Great Hall, located at the Capitol Convention Center, "Emancipation Hall."

The U.S. Capitol and its iconic dome are symbols of representative democracy in our country. As the United States has grown and changed over its 225-year history, so has the Capitol. The Capitol Building or the, quote, "temple of liberty," as it was known early on, ironically was built, in large part, by, quote, "Negro hires," a term used to indicate that the enslaved blacks who helped build the Capitol were hired out, not hired. More accurately, they were leased or contracted out by their owners to do the work, essentially a contract between the Congress of the United States and slaveholders, with all of the funds going directly to the pockets of the slave owners.

The slaves who helped to build the Capitol came not only from Southern States like Maryland and Virginia; some were property of residents of the Nation's capital, itself, where slaves lived and worked until Congress abolished slavery in the District in 1863, only 9 months before the Emancipation Proclamation. Slaves here and in the rest of the United States often were skilled craftsmen who were profitable not only to the slave owners' households but also for the skills they could bring to others as Negro hires.

One of the many ironies of slavery is that, when emancipation finally arrived, slaves throughout the United States had the entire skillset for any project in our country. They were an indigenous workforce, ready and anxious to work. Ubiquitous discrimination across the country, however, confined blacks to joblessness unless no whites, including newly arrived immigrants, were available. A bitter freedom for slaves who wanted nothing more than their freedom and the ability to work became a national tragedy.

A major hall in the new Capitol Building 200 years later provides but a token of the respect and gratitude these slave laborers never received. Today, little remains on Capitol Hill that bears the imprint of slave labor. Much of the carpentry work, including the mahogany pine and walnut doors, has been lost to fires, rebuilding and remodeling. History wiped away the work of these slaves without so much as a marker to indicate their contributions. The history of the slave contributions has been suppressed even in official histories of the Capitol until recent years.

We are grateful to the bipartisan taskforce, where Representative John Lewis, among others, served as a member, that was established several years ago in anticipation of the recognition of the contributions of slave labor, as envisioned by House Congressional Resolution 130.

In 1998, following the shooting death of Capitol Police officers, the first in the Nation's history, I introduced H.R. 4347, the Jacob Joseph Chestnut-John Michael Gibson United States Capitol Visitor Center Act of 1998. The bill provided for enhanced security on the Capitol grounds and for an appropriate place to welcome our constituents, taking into account their security, health and comfort.

Nine years later, I had the pleasure of touring the graceful new addition to the Capitol, the Capitol Visitor Center. About 97 percent completed, finishing touches are in progress, such as the installation of bronze framework around the doors and carpet installation, of cafeteria countertops and millwork, plaster and paint, along with a bronze handrail being applied to the three-level spiral staircase that will welcome visitors in elegant style to this outstanding facility. The facility contains so much history and so many new amenities that it is nothing less than a new, premiere tourist destination that we in the District of Columbia particularly welcome.

The Congress and the Nation depend on this city to be welcoming to the constituents of Members of the House and Senate and to visitors from around the world. The District is, indeed, one of America's preeminent tourist destinations, and consequently, there is a perfect synergy between what Congress and the District of Columbia want for tourists who come to the city to visit historic sites.

City officials and I are working closely with Capitol officials on facilitating getting millions of new visitors, beyond the 3 million we already get, to this new venue that offers a modern setting in which to view the history of Congress and our contributions as a body to our country. Included in this landmark will be an exhibition gallery, a 550-seat cafeteria, gift shops and visitor orientation theaters.

At nearly 580,000 square feet, this project is the largest in the Capitol's 212-year history. No longer will visitors stand in long lines and arrive at the beginning of their Capitol tour tired, hungry and often with little knowledge of what they are about to see. Not only will the new center provide greater security, it will afford visitors an enjoyable and educational experience that would be incomplete if the untold story of the building of the Capitol were to remain untold.

Naming the Great Hall for the long, unrecognized contributions of slaves who built our Capitol will, in some very small way, honor the importance of their contributions to their country and our determination to continue to erase the conditions that derive from that period in our history.

I am pleased to recognize the Ranking Member for any statement he may have.

Mr. GRAVES. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am, actually, going to yield to the Ranking Member of the Full Committee for his statement, particularly in the essence of time.

Mr. MICA. Well, thank you. Thank you both, Mr. Graves and Ms. Norton, and thank you for conducting this hearing.

As I have said to Ms. Norton and Mr. Graves in the past, I think it is important that our Committee assume jurisdiction and responsibility, which we have always had over this project. And I want to take a few minutes to talk about the proposal before us today, naming the Great Hall.

Let me reminisce a bit. Back in the 1980s, I was the Chief of Staff and spent a lot of time studying the history for 5 years of the Capitol Building, and I learned a lot about its history. When I came as a Member in January of 1993—and even back then, as many of you and, I think, as the Chairlady referred to it in her opening statements, we all saw the lines in heat, rain, snow, sleet, that millions of our—I call them the “owners.” When they showed up, they did not get very good treatment. They got left out in the cold, so to speak.

And then I learned a little bit about former proposals. When they extended the east front out, they talked about either putting a visitors’ center in or a parking garage for better convenience. Ironically, actually, when a visitors’ center was proposed, it was shot down by Republicans, I think led by Newt Gingrich, who, at the time, were running huge deficits and did not want all public money to go into financing a project.

So I came on the scene in 1993, and one of the things I remember as a Member and being someone who loved history is I went over to the Library of Congress, and we have a great entre. In those days, you could actually go back in the stacks—that has been limited now—and you could see the incredible treasures that we have firsthand and actually take some of the books. And they have far more than books. I remember the maps, their map section. They had the contents of Lincoln’s pockets when he was assassinated over there. There is just an incredible wealth of treasures that the average citizen never gets to see, nor did we have any exhibition space to show those things.

I went down to the National Archives, and I remember seeing the Emancipation Proclamation, which was kind of interesting, and they told me it is very rarely shown because rare documents like that are only taken out and put in the most protected area because they are rare, rare, rare national treasures and historic treasures. I thought, what a shame that, first, for the people who this is all done for by their government, they do not get a chance to see it, and then the great treasures, we are the keeper of, and they do not get to see. Again, I remember specifically the Emancipation Proclamation.

So, when I started looking at my legislative priorities, the first one was to build a visitors' center, and I did not get a very good reception. We were in the minority in the beginning. Finally, we took over, and I introduced several measures. And actually, they were considered in two hearings. I think one was in 1995, right after we took control, and in 1998. I still had the stumbling block of Newt Gingrich and public funding. We were starting to get the budget in balance, and the deal that we cut with Newt Gingrich to make the visitors' center go forward was to raise half the money privately and half publicly.

At that time, the visitors' center—well, originally, it was \$78 million, and then when George White put in the proposal and went back and looked at it and did some juggling, he came in slightly over \$100 million, I remember. I said, "George," I said, "I cannot go to the Public Works-Transportation Committee meeting and promote a project that costs \$100 million. So you had better get back there and cut some of this out. We can add it in later." So I think he came in and brought it in, in about 1998, at one of those hearings.

But in any event, we launched a visitors' center with that deal. We, actually, had a group that raised the money. The last meeting that was held was on the evening of September 10th. That was in the Speaker's dining room. I attended that. It was September 10, 2001, which, ironically, put me in the Pentagon the next morning with Donald Rumsfeld. That is another story.

I point this out to give you some of the history of my involvement. I was appointed to the Capitol Preservation Commission until just January, so I have seen the project from the beginning and probably have more of the historical knowledge.

It is true there were very few votes taken. The one we did to authorize the project was probably the longest in history. It lasted almost 30 days because of all of the prima donnas, as I call them, on the Preservation Commission, who were chairmen and leadership of key committees. And the leadership of the House and Senate had to meet and approve the project, which we did in a vote, again, that was extended for some time. That brings us up to building the center and some of the purpose for that.

Now, I am not opposed to naming a room or a space after the slaves who helped build this facility. I do not think that the Great Hall, though, is the appropriate hall. And I think that it would be more appropriate if you consider—if you want to look at the historic context of what I think would be appropriate, the exhibition hall—and some of this space was designed by Mr. Applebaum.

I remember my first meeting with Mr. Applebaum when he was chosen to design this. Of course, he did the Holocaust Museum. I said, "Do you know what is going to go in this space?" then I described to him some of the documents like the Emancipation Proclamation and things that are rarely seen. I said, "Have you been to the Library of Congress to see any of the treasures that are down in the National Archives?" he said, "No." I said, "Well, I am going to terminate this meeting with you, because I want you to go down and see those things, these treasures, that belong to the people and that are some of our most valuable things and have

them on display." And he went back, and he did see it, and then we met again, and he designed some of the spaces, as you know.

And I think that, given—and I will tell you a little bit more of the history that I think is important in this—I think that, actually, the Great Hall is an inappropriate place to name after those who sacrificed through slavery. The Great Hall, actually, will be the repository of the cast in plaster that was done by Thomas Crawford. Actually, we put in skylights so you could see the pediments of the building. Ironically, you will see in both of those instances the decisions by someone who had no respect for slavery, who, in fact, led the whole cause of the Confederacy based on keeping the enslavement of people, who was the one who had the biggest impact on how we view the Capitol today, the extension, the 1850s extension of the House and the Senate. And the person who did that was at first a Senator and an appropriator; that was Jefferson Davis. And then Jefferson Davis, ironically, was the Secretary of War when the building was built.

If you go back and look at the history, Thomas Crawford was one of the most accomplished sculptors and was picked for the responsibility of sculpting both the pediment of the Senate and also the Statue of Freedom that we have on the top. His studio was in Rome, but he was an American. Actually, you could go back and look at the documents. Jefferson Davis altered the statues—the pediment you see of the Senate and the Statue of Freedom, because when he originally designed those figures, he had the egalitarian cap which stood for liberty, fraternity and equality. He did not favor equality.

So, ironically, you will have staring in the visitor's eye the symbols of Jefferson Davis, who was not very inclined to have the Nation's Capitol and that view you will be seeing have anything to do with the emancipation of the slaves.

In opposition to that, you have an Exhibition Hall here which very few folks—I remember back in the 1980s, I had heard of Washington's tomb, but I never knew where it was, and I did not know that it housed the catafalque of the great emancipator, Abraham Lincoln. You know, in the space that we have designed, at the very center of the space is going to be this little niche, and in that niche, we are going to place the catafalque of the great emancipator, Abraham Lincoln.

So, within that space, you will have something that people have not seen, except on rare occasions, in the ceremonial death of some famous American. And you will also have the ability to show that document that was part of the motivation for this space that people could see.

So that would be my first preference, to name a hall, which truly will, for generations, be able to display the documents of freedom for slaves and for all of the rights and other things that we have. Then, secondly, you will also have the funeral of the great emancipator there. So that would be my first consideration and suggestion.

The second is, this is where the emancipators of the future will be, and that is our successors. It was not Congress that freed the slaves; it was Abraham Lincoln, by his proclamation. But we do have the largest auditorium, which will be where the House of Rep-

representatives and future joint sessions will meet as we make repairs and other renovations to the existing spaces.

I gave you my first preference, which has both its roots in the history of the building and in the evolution of the visitors' center, and then I gave you my second choice. So those are some of the points that I wanted to make today.

I have no objection to, again, recognizing those. There are many—Joe is here—there are Italian Americans, there are indentured whites who also built the Capitol. I am very proud of my Italian American heritage and Brumidi, who is often mentioned, but he is only one of numerous people who contributed to the Capitol, including those who were enslaved. So I do feel it is appropriate—I do—to name a significant space in this new center, and those are my thoughts.

I appreciate your allowing me to go a little bit beyond to share some of the history, because I think it needs to be recorded. And thank you for allowing me to participate. I look forward to working with both of you on the Committee and on the Full Committee in the House on this project.

Thank you.

Ms. NORTON. I thank the Ranking Member for his remarks. We, certainly, will look more closely at what you are saying.

I do want to say for the record that Congress recognized that the Capitol was built by working people, but when the study committee was set up—and it was set up by the prior Congress before the present majority came here—it was set up with the understanding that there had to be special recognition for people who were slaves and who built the Capitol.

No one wants to take anything from working people who, in fact, contributed to building this great Capitol. And whenever we speak about the Capitol, we say that the slaves were among others, including free blacks and many white people.

The circumstances under which black craftsmen contributed to this building has never been recognized, even though the contributions of most Americans have managed to be recognized in some form or fashion somewhere. Thus, it was thought by Congress that the slaves should be singled out. And that is not because they were black; it was because they had been slaves and had made this special contribution to representative democracy.

Mr. Cohen?

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Madam Chair. I am pleased to be here and to speak in favor of the legislation that my colleague from Tennessee, Representative Wamp, and my colleague from Illinois, Representative Jackson, have introduced.

It is entirely fitting and appropriate that there be a special recognition of what slaves gave, not only to this Capitol but to this country. The contributions of slaves to this country's good fortune have not been recognized, and most people do not know them. And by naming this hall the Emancipation Hall and having the story in this hall, where so many Americans come to reflect on their heritage and this great country and to understand the foundations and to see where slavery contributed and to understand more about slavery and the role it played in this country and the lack of remu-

neration or consideration ever given to people, obviously, who were slaves, is important and appropriate.

You get a new country and you advertise, you know, "Come over here. We are going to take land from the Native American Indians, and we are going to give you an opportunity to have slave labor." It is a heck of a way to start a country or a business. You know, you get land from somebody else and get labor that does not cost you anything. Great start. That is a great way to boost a country.

People have to understand that is how this country really got its great start, especially the southern part of the United States. And it was not just the farmers; it was the folks who shipped the cotton, who insured the cotton, who produced the clothes. It was basically the railroads, the shipping industry, everybody. And that is who were the main cogs in your economy, then: the railroads, the steamship companies, the Merchant Marines, as well as the landed folk and the traders. So they had a pretty good opportunity to benefit from slave labor, and people need to learn about that and see it.

I commend each of you for bringing this bill. It is the right thing to do. It has 227 cosponsors. I hope it has 435 votes.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Cohen.

Could I ask our two witnesses if they would come forward now? Frankly, proceed in whatever order suits you.

**TESTIMONY OF HON. ZACH WAMP, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF TENNESSEE; HON. JESSE JACKSON, JR., A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS**

Mr. WAMP. Thank you, Madam Chairman. Out of my friend Jesse Jackson's courtesy, I will go first. Let me just say that I have a written statement for the record, but I do not want to read it. I just want to speak from the heart to you, Madam Chairman.

Thank you so much for calling this hearing, and I would encourage you to move the bill. Do not wait on any appropriations bill. When an idea this good surfaces, we all need to come together. We got 227 cosponsors in 2 days. We could have gotten probably 400 or more if we had just wanted to have cosponsors, but we just wanted enough cosponsors to get you to call a hearing and to consider this bill.

I served on this Committee years ago before I went to the Appropriations Committee, and I admire you so very much, and I thank you so much, Madam Chairman, for this opportunity.

And I want to recognize the distinguished Ranking Member of the Full Committee, Mr. Mica, who spoke, and, of course, on the Subcommittee, my friend Sam Graves. But I would beg to differ with the distinguished Chairman of the Full Committee. I do want to say for the record that the quality of the CVC is, in large part, due to his commitment to this. And the quality is there; the cost, obviously, is more.

I am the Ranking Member of the Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee, which is now charged with bringing this project in next year for landing and in trying to bring it in as close to the current budget and timeline as we possibly can. It got bigger

and more costly than we wanted, but I have taken, in the last 13 years, over 1,700 groups through the Capitol. I do all my tours myself, and I love it. I will do one tonight. I had 250 college students here this weekend, and I took them through the Capitol. I tell a lot of stories and study a lot of the history, as Mr. Mica does.

And one time, about 10 years ago, I was between the concrete drum of the Rotunda and the exterior, going up for a dome tour, and I stopped and asked one of the red-coat tour guides coming down, "What are these little hooks and hangers that are hanging all the way around the perimeter of the dome?" he said, "Man, that is a great question. Few people ever ask about it, but that is where they hung their lanterns at night while people slept here while building the dome of the Rotunda." And he said, ironically, at that time, it would have been a combination of slave labor and the Union soldiers who were fighting for their freedom on the battlefield. They rotated in and out of Washington for respite off the battlefield, to come here. And they worked side by side. And he said, "Just imagine the Jew's harp playing and them kind of spend the time together, sleeping there, to go back in to build the dome, in the depths of the Civil War, to complete the Capitol in its current form."

This CVC is 580,000 square feet. The current Capitol is about 770,000 square feet. So we are dramatically, by about two-thirds the size, increasing the scope of the Capitol. Well, the new space that, unfortunately, is referred to as the Great Hall is 20,000 square feet of floor space. That is almost three times the size of the floor space of the Rotunda. This is the largest room, and it is going to actually be the room with the most people in it. Once the CVC opens the Capitol in totality, this room will be the room with the most people in it, because that is where all of the visitors will be staged as they enter the Capitol.

What more important way to honor this very important part of American history than to name this hall Emancipation Hall? This is where it should be honored in the most meaningful way in this grand hall. Right through the tunnel at the Library of Congress is the Great Hall. It is the foyer of the Library of Congress. It has been for over 100 years. It is one of the most ornate spaces in the United States of America.

From the first hearing we held in our Appropriations Subcommittee in January forward, everyone agrees—the architect and everyone involved—that you cannot have two rooms named the Great Hall on each end of the tunnel. That is mass confusion. Everyone says that is a mistake. It should not be called the Great Hall.

So, obviously, step one: It should not be called the Great Hall because that is duplicative, and it is going to be very confusing, so we need to change the name.

Number two, then what will it be called? And that is obviously the jurisdiction of this Subcommittee. But emancipation is the proper way to do this. This is bigger than any of us. That is why there is so much support for this, because this is bigger. You may say, "What is a white guy from the South doing offering Emancipation Hall?" hey, I think that is pretty cool. That is the way it



ought to be. We need reconciliation, healing. This brings about justice.

This, actually, may be a bigger way to honor them than you would think. I do not think it is a small thing. I think it is a big thing. I think every person who comes through this Capitol from that day forward is told the story of how important this chapter in American history was to emancipate people, to free them, to treat them equally. In this hall, you look up through the glass, and you see that dome, and you know what it meant. You knew that Lincoln was petitioned during the Civil War to stop the construction of the dome because the cast iron was depleting our ability to prosecute the war, and he said, "No. The world is watching, and we are divided, and the dome will be a symbol to the world that we are still a union," and he persevered and emancipated. He was white, too.

We should come together through this process. We should use this as an opportunity to bring the Congress to a better place so there can be healing and reconciliation and so that we can honor this labor and these people, these great Americans who did this who have never been honored. This is bigger than us.

Please, do not delay. Please, report this bill expeditiously to the floor. Take it to the Senate. Let us do this together. Let there not be a division of all of the lessons learned from the divisions of history. We should not do this now. That is why I am so honored to be a partner with Jesse Jackson, Jr., and to do this. Friends from across the aisle, do this together.

I yield to him.

Mr. JACKSON. Madam Chair, Ranking Member Graves and Members of the Subcommittee, and Mr. Mica, I am pleased to testify in support of legislation to rename the main hall of the Capitol Visitor Center as Emancipation Hall.

In June of this year, I was proud to team up with my good friend and colleague Zach Wamp in offering an identical measure in the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill. And while that bill has passed the Congress, we acknowledge the jurisdiction of this Committee and return to this Committee with more than 227 Members of Congress who support moving independent legislation to advance this proposition.

When I spoke to the Appropriations Committee in June, I urged my colleagues to begin a new chapter in history and to fight for emancipation. Emancipation is the great theme of Americans' still unfolding story. Unlike what Mr. Mica indicated in his remarks, it is not a side story, it is not a side room. It is central to understanding America, it is central to the understanding of this institution, and it is central to the development of this building and this democracy.

As the future entryway and focal point for the millions of visitors each year to the Nation's Capitol, Emancipation Hall will serve and stand as a memorial to our country's struggle and journey from slavery to freedom. Lincoln's first and second inaugural address occurred on the stairs directly above Emancipation Hall. The Lincoln Memorial has both of those speeches in great detail, indicating the great dilemma that confronted his presidency, not only in the construction of the Capitol, itself, but in the maintenance of the Union.

In fact, saving the Union and making the Union more perfect were his penultimate and primary goals.

Emancipation—that preeminent event in American history, that definitive moment, that contemporary memory that tends to let go and long since escape—is not included in the mural in the Rotunda, depicting the rise of our Nation. In fact, in the Capitol Rotunda, where pilgrims arrive on one end of the mural, you follow the story all the way around to the Wright Brothers. There is not a single African American or person of color, other than Native Americans, in that story. They are completely left out of the story of America. For the millions of visitors who visit our Capitol Rotunda, the story of our journey from slavery to freedom is not depicted.

Emancipation is forgotten as we race up the Capitol stairs every day to vote. They are made out of granite from Georgia's venerable and infamous Stone Mountain, where the Ku Klux Klan was born.

The Senate Chamber, the old Senate Chamber, for the millions of Americans who visit our Capitol, is known for one primary event: the beating of Senator Charles Sumner by Preston Brooks, a Congressman from South Carolina. And the book still marks the location in that room where Charles Sumner was caned.

Old Statuary Hall, never divided between Democrats and Republicans, it is divided primarily by this side of the aisle and that side of the aisle as free States and slave States. For the millions of visitors who visit Statuary Hall, they are told of a single story—the acoustics of the building, the acoustics of the room, how to talk to the floor, and how to run to the other side of the room and hear your voice echoing off of the ceiling—not the history of how slaves and States were admitted to the Union, one free and one slave, not the California compromise, not the compromise of 1832, not the compromise of 1834, not the secession of States from the Union, but for the millions of Americans who enter our Statuary Hall, if you stand right here and talk to the floor and if you run to the other side of the room, you can hear the echo chamber of the acoustically sound Old Statuary Hall.

The Old Supreme Court Chamber is known for three things—the *Amistad* Africans, the *Dred Scott* decision, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision—all decided in this building. To this day, the most scurrilous part of Chief Justice Taney's record was his decision in *Dred Scott*. For the most part, the idea of building a more perfect union occurred under Taney's Supreme Court Chief Justiceship, but his entire reign on the Court was profoundly affected by one infamous decision, *Dred Scott*.

So race, slavery, emancipation is not a room, like the Ranking Member said, off to the side of the Capitol. It is central to who we are as a country. Yet, the story in the Capitol Rotunda, in Statuary Hall, in the Old Supreme Court Chamber, in the Old Senate Chamber—in every way that we can possibly find, we suppress the story. Emancipation Hall is ignored. Emancipation is ignored in Statuary Hall, as we count among our honored dead Confederate President and Democrat Jefferson Davis; Confederate Vice President and Democrat Alexander Hamilton Stephens; Confederate Democrat General Robert E. Lee, still wearing his Confederate States of

America uniform; and Confederate Democrat General Joseph Wheeler, still in uniform.

But a little-known party founded in Ripon, Wisconsin, in 1854 came into existence, the Republican Party, against this fundamental Democratic Party philosophy of the idea of ending the peculiar institution of slavery, emancipating them and building a more perfect union for all Americans. The idea of Emancipation Hall is perfectly suited to be introduced by a gentleman from the South, Mr. Wamp. The idea that a Republican would fight for emancipation is a very historically accurate process, and I congratulate the gentleman.

Instead of visitors getting that information, we reduce the story of our Nation—that is, how States have gone from slavery to freedom—into a conversation about acoustics. No one wants to deal with the painful past. So, instead, we suppress the story, and we suppress everyone's history. We must tell an honest and informed story of all that has come before us.

The United States Congress has the power and the authority to tell the real story. We can do better by capturing the fullness of the meaning of our Republic's history in this Capitol. We must tell visitors about the story of freedom and the costly course of emancipation. Who would we be without emancipation? Our House divided would not stand. We would not have the ability or the moral authority to fight for democracy around the globe. We would not have, as Abraham Lincoln said, a new birth of freedom so that a government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the face of the earth.

Placing Emancipation Hall in the Capitol Visitor Center is a small step, but a significant step, on our journey toward freedom from the ongoing struggles and problems associated with the legacy of slavery. This works largely because we are still not comfortable talking about this shameful legacy, talking about race, talking about class. Fifty years ago today, nine students in Little Rock, Arkansas, forced us to talk about race and class. Last week, six students in Jena, Louisiana, were supported by thousands of marchers who forced us to talk about race and class.

Emancipation Hall will remind every American and everyone from around the world who visits our Capitol of our Nation's continuing commitment to move from oppression to equality, from division to union, a more perfect union. This hall will stand as a testament to the fact that the long arc of history bends toward freedom and justice.

I would like to close, Madam Chair, on just two small points. Just a couple hundred yards from the entrance to Emancipation Hall, our forebears, our forefathers, placed a marker to the significance of this particular event. Just 200 yards from the entrance to Emancipation Hall is the following statue—the following monument on the circle directly in front of the new Capitol Visitor Center.

On this date, April 4th, Abraham Lincoln visited Richmond. He went to the Confederate White House and sat on the President's chair. As he walked the streets of Richmond, crowds gathered around him, including former slaves who proclaimed him, among other things, and I quote, "the great messiah." Overwhelmed by

rare emotions, Lincoln said to one black man who fell on his knees in front of him, quote, "Don't kneel to me. This is not right. You must kneel to God only and thank him for the liberty you will enjoy hereafter." Describing these events in Richmond from a desk in the Confederate Capitol to the Philadelphia press shortly after Gettysburg was its reporter T. Morris Chester, a black man.

Why do I not, as the Chairman, try to indicate and support the idea of Liberty Hall? Because, when Lincoln uses the word "liberty" here, he is talking about the human condition of moving from chattel slavery to liberty. The word "liberty," in contemporary American English, has taken on a different meaning. "liberty" in today's meaning has nothing to do with the transition of people from a particular condition to freedom. It has something to do, for example, with our ability as a Nation—Blackwater now argues that they have a liberty, a right, to do business in Iraq. General Motors, yesterday, announced their liberty, their right, to move their plants to other parts of the world and take advantage of workers. "liberty" today takes on a different meaning than the liberty for which Lincoln was talking about when this man fell to his knees. And therefore, freedom and emancipation more appropriately and more accurately capture precisely what Mr. Lincoln was talking about when he made this statement, which serves as a marker to the visitors' center that we seek to build as the 110th Congress, and name.

Lastly, the Congress of the United States is responsible for emancipation. The Congress did vote for emancipation. The first 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which passed this institution before the Civil War and before the secession of States from the Union, authorized the maintenance and the continuance of the peculiar institution of slavery from then until the indefinite future. With the secession of the States from the Union, such an amendment to the Constitution, even though it passed the Congress by the necessary votes, was never allowed to be added to the Constitution.

Then, in 1863, when President Abraham Lincoln passed the Emancipation Proclamation in executive order, it freed the slaves in some States but kept them in place in other States, and there is great debate as to whether or not that Emancipation Proclamation actually had the power to free the slaves. After Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, this Congress then voted again on a new 13th Amendment with completely new language. And it is that 13th Amendment that Southern States, in order to be brought back into the Union, had to ratify, which laid the foundation for the contemporary 13th Amendment, the 14th Amendment and the 15th Amendment to the Constitution.

And therefore, it is appropriate that this Congress recognize that this is not an act by Lincoln; it is an act by the Congress to change the fundamental founding document of this Nation to ensure that emancipation would become part of who we are, going forward.

So I conclude just by saying, Madam Chair, that this bill is appropriate before this Committee, but most importantly, Mr. Counsel and Members of the Republican Party who are still in attendance, it is important that this bill move through the Congress without objection. It is not to be divided, Democrats and Republicans,

blacks and whites. This should not be the story that emerges out of the 110th Congress.

I believe we can pass this bill because we have sufficient numbers to pass it as a stand-alone piece of legislation, but this legislation should leave this Congress unanimous. And we should not open up a national debate about who is a racist, who is not a racist because they did not understand the history and the context and the significance of this event. And that is why the appropriators, themselves, decided to move on it. And it is my hope that this Committee will give it thoughtful consideration, move it out unanimously, and let us move this chapter forward.

I thank the gentlechairman.

Ms. NORTON. I thank both of you for, really, deeply felt and important testimony.

Let me just ask a few questions and then go to Mr. Cohen.

Do you know of any other bill for naming the Great Hall that is pending in the House or Senate?

Mr. WAMP. Not to my knowledge, no, Madam Chair.

Mr. JACKSON. Not to my knowledge, Madam Chair.

Ms. NORTON. Representative Jackson spoke of the symbolism of the stairs above the Great Hall and Lincoln, himself. The Ranking Member pointed to things in the Great Hall of which I am unfamiliar.

Do you have any knowledge of what it was specifically that he was concerned about that would be in the Great Hall, as much as he is not here now? Perhaps you understand that.

Mr. WAMP. Let me address that.

The artist who actually did the Statue of Freedom above the dome is what he is talking about and the other things that that artist did in his life. I think, frankly, it was completely off track of where we are at and the focus of this hearing, because we are talking about Emancipation Hall being this great room, and if you have been there—and I have been there many, many, many times—you are looking right at the dome, which is exactly—now, the catafalque for Lincoln is also right off of this room, and that very display area, actually, would not be the most appropriate place to call Emancipation Hall, because it is already programmed in different areas.

And if you listen to Tom Fontana, who is the expert who actually planned all this, they already have all of that programmed and exactly how it is supposed to step us up through the history of the legislative process. That whole space was designed to teach the visitor the legislative process and to tie the House and the Senate in with history, not a specific moment in history, like emancipation.

That is why it is so important, I think, that when people come into this hall that it be referred to as Emancipation Hall, but that was really off the topic.

Plus, let me say that, as to the idea that the theater might be called Emancipation Hall, it is not open to the public. There is no public access to the theater where the Congress is going to sit and meet. So he had two alternatives, neither of which is appropriate, frankly, respectfully, very respectfully, because Tom Fontana would tell you they have already programmed the way one of them is,

which is to teach the visitor the legislative process, and the other one does not even have public access.

Mr. JACKSON. In addition to the ranking Republican's concerns and Mr. Wamp's concerns about what is appropriate in the room, you cannot separate subsequent freedom movements or freedom events from this central event of overcoming the limitations of States' rights and State-centered federalism over and against the idea of building a more perfect union for all Americans. It was the women's suffragettes and the abolitionists who would fight and lead a great struggle that would lend itself to the new language of the 13th Amendment that ultimately freed the slaves.

This whole idea of Juneteenth in Texas is not that they did not get the word of the Emancipation Proclamation, but the Texans would argue that, as long as the Constitution allowed their State to maintain the institution of slavery, only a 13th Amendment to the Constitution could free them. And that is why not until 1865 did Texans get the idea that they could no longer maintain chattel slavery.

Most importantly, when we started the Emancipation Hall and we recognized that suffragettes and abolitionists would fight for the language that would lead to the 15th Amendment and a great division in that movement would then lead the suffragettes to fight for their own language and their own amendment that would manifest itself in the 19th Amendment, many of these movements have their foundation in the struggle over ending the peculiar institution in the States. And so it is appropriate to have a hall named after the suffragettes. It is appropriate to have a hall named after other great movements.

But the central movement that lays the foundation for those movements is the addition of the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments and the role that these individuals played in this institution in constructing the building.

Ms. NORTON. There is a vote on. I am going to ask Mr. Graves if he has any questions. I am going to go to Mr. Cohen at this point.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to thank the two gentlemen for their remarks, both of whom well addressed the subject.

And particularly, not with any derogation or lessening to my distinguished colleague from Tennessee, but, Mr. Jackson, it is an honor for me to be in this body, and your speech was one of the best I have heard since I have been in it. And it made me very proud to be a Member of this House of Representatives.

Mr. JACKSON. Thank you, Mr. Cohen.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Mr. Cohen.

On visiting the visitors' center, I asked if there was anything already in place. This was, of course, some months ago, and I was really saddened by what they pointed to—a kind of railing, a kind of token alongside—as if there were other events in the history of our country, far greater than building the Capitol, that were a symbolism of slavery across the face of this country from its beginning that could be captured in some way by some object in a room.

We are going to have to try to clarify what it is, of course, that the Ranking Member brought up, and we are pleased to do that.

I agree with the two Members who have worked so hard for this bill, and congratulate them. That delay is not in order because, this time, we really do think they are going to finish the Capitol Visitor Center, and we would like to give it a name.

I close simply by saying, if you are a third-generation Washingtonian, there is always something personal in a discussion of slavery in the District of Columbia. My own great-grandfather did not arrive until the 1850s, but he arrived in the way so many African Americans did. He ran away from a slave plantation in Virginia, and, like so many slaves, he immediately found work on the streets because they were building the District of Columbia and there was not enough labor. That was one of the important reasons that slave labor in the prior decades was important to building the Capitol, especially since it required some skilled labor.

The fact is, my friends, that every single public building in the District of Columbia until 1863 was built, in part, with slave labor, and you would never know it. May, at least, the visitors' convention center give us a larger-than-life opportunity to commemorate that fact.

Mr. JACKSON. May I make one observation? I did not even talk with Mr. Wamp about this. Because I am so concerned that this be done right, I do not know if it is appropriate, but at the appropriate time, I would be more than willing to make a unanimous-consent request to remove my name as one of the chief cosponsors and add you and Mr. Graves, if you are able to work it out, so that this reflects the kind of bipartisan approach that it deserves.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Jackson, I am already on the bill. This is not about whose name is on the bill. The Congress has closed in around this notion out of courtesy.

Of course, the Ranking Member has raised issues. Those issues must be responded to on the record, but the point is to move the bill forward. And I do not see any impediment, except that I think we have an obligation to look at what the Ranking Member raised.

I am pleased to call this hearing to a close and facilitate everybody's rushing to the floor.

Mr. JACKSON. Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Whereupon, at 2:57 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

**OPENING STATEMENT OF REP. STEVE COHEN**

Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public  
Buildings and Emergency Management

"Hearing on H.R. 3315, a bill to name the great hall of the Capitol Visitors Center as  
Emancipation Hall"



September 25, 2007

I look forward to hearing testimony from my colleague, the honorable gentleman from Illinois, Congressman Jackson as well as the gentleman from the great state of Tennessee, Congressman Wamp on their support for H.R. 3315, which names the great hall of the Capitol Visitor Center "Emancipation Hall."

An unfortunate reality regarding the history of the Capitol is that slave labor played a pivotal part in its construction. It does a great disservice to those individuals that there is absolutely know recognition of this fact in the current retelling of its history or in the artwork and artifacts displayed.

In naming this space Emancipation Hall, this Congress takes a pivotal step forward in acknowledging the great truth that it is an abomination for this body not to acknowledge slavery's role in the foundation of our democracy. Apology is preceded by acknowledgement, so I am consequently delighted that so many Members of Congress have united in taking this first step and remain optimistic that we as a body can and will do more to both acknowledge and apologize for the great atrocity of American slavery.

I am pleased to join the 227 bipartisan House Members as an original cosponsor of this legislation and support its swift passage.



**Testimony by Congressman Jesse L. Jackson, Jr.**

**Before the  
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and  
Emergency Management  
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure  
U.S. House of Representatives**

**September 25, 2007**

---

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Shuster, and members of the subcommittee, I am pleased to testify in support of legislation to rename the main hall of the Capitol's Visitor Center as Emancipation Hall.

In June of this year, I was proud to team up with my good friend and colleague, Congressman Zach Wamp, in offering an identical measure in the Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill.

With that appropriations measure pending in the Senate, this stand alone bill may prove necessary if our amendment's language is not included in the final Legislative Branch appropriations bill.

When I spoke before the Appropriations committee in June, I urged my colleagues to begin a new chapter in history and fight for Emancipation!

Emancipation is the great theme of America's still unfolding story.

As the future entry way and focal point for the millions of visitors each year to the nation's Capitol, Emancipation Hall will serve and stand as a memorial to our country's struggle and journey from slavery to liberty.

Emancipation is not included in the mural in the Rotunda depicting our rise as a nation. Emancipation is forgotten as we race up the Capitol steps made out of granite from Georgia's venerable and infamous Stone Mountain, where the Ku Klux Klan was reborn.

Emancipation is ignored in Statuary Hall as we count among our honored dead Confederate President Jefferson Davis, Confederate Vice President Alexander Hamilton Stephens, Confederate General Robert E. Lee, and Confederate Commander Joseph Wheeler -- still in uniform.

Instead of visitors getting that information, we've reduced the story of our nation - how states came from slavery to freedom - into a conversation about acoustics in Statuary Hall. People talking to the floor, while other people are listening!

No one wants to deal with the painful past so instead we suppress the story and suppress everyone's history. We must tell an honest and informed story of all that has come before us.

The United States Congress has the power and authority to tell the real story. We can do better in capturing the fullness of the meaning of our Republic's history in this Capitol. We must tell visitors about liberty's costly course.

We would not be who we are without emancipation. Our house divided would not have stood. We would not have the ability or authority to fight for democracy around the globe. We would not have had, as Abraham Lincoln said, "A new birth of freedom" so that "government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

Placing an "Emancipation Hall" in the Capitol Visitors Center is a small step, but a significant step on our journey toward freedom from the ongoing structures and problems associated with the legacy of slavery. This works largely because we are still not comfortable even talking about that shameful legacy. Talking about race. Talking about class.

50 years ago today, 9 students in Little Rock, Arkansas, forced us to talk about race and class. Last week, 6 students in Jena, Louisiana, were supported by thousands of marchers who forced us to talk about race and class.

Emancipation Hall will remind every American, and everyone from around the world who visits our Capitol, of our nation's continuing commitment to move from oppression to equality and from division to union - a more perfect union.

This hall will stand as a testament to the fact that the long arc of history bends toward freedom and justice.

**ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON**  
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

**COMMITTEE ON  
TRANSPORTATION AND  
INFRASTRUCTURE**  
SUBCOMMITTEES:

CHAIRWOMAN  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,  
PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND EMERGENCY  
MANAGEMENT  
AVIATION  
WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT



**Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515**

**COMMITTEE ON  
OVERSIGHT AND  
GOVERNMENT REFORM**

SUBCOMMITTEES:  
FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL  
SERVICE, AND DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
\* COVERS DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA ISSUES

**COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY**

SUBCOMMITTEES:  
TRANSPORTATION SECURITY, AND  
INVESTMENT PROTECTION  
EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION,  
PREPAREDNESS, AND RESPONSE

**STATEMENT OF  
THE HONORABLE ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON  
SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON  
H.R. 3315  
TO NAME THE GREAT HALL AT THE CAPITOL VISITOR CENTER  
EMANCIPATION HALL**

I am very pleased to welcome to today's hearing Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. and Congressman Zach Wamp, key sponsors of the resolution to name the great hall located at the Capitol Visitor Center as "Emancipation Hall."

The U.S. Capitol and its iconic dome are symbols of representative democracy. As our country has grown and changed over its 225 year history, so has the Capitol. The Capitol Building, or the "Temple of Liberty" as it was known early on, ironically was built in large part by "negro hires," a term used to indicate that the enslaved blacks who helped to build the Capitol were hired out, not hired. More accurately they were leased or contracted out by their owners to do the work, essentially a contract between Congress and slaveowners, with all the funds going directly to the pockets of the slaveowners. The slaves who helped to build the Capitol came not only from southern states like Maryland and Virginia. Some were property of residents of the nation's capital itself, where slaves lived and worked until Congress abolished slavery in the District in 1863, only nine months before the Emancipation Proclamation. Slaves here and in the rest of United States often were skilled craftsmen who were profitable not only to the slaveowners' household, but also for the skills they brought to others as "negro hires." One of the many ironies of slavery is that when emancipation finally arrived, slaves throughout the United States had the entire skill set for any project in our country; they were an indigenous workforce ready and anxious to work. Ubiquitous discrimination across the country, however, confined blacks to joblessness unless no whites, including newly arrived immigrants were available. A bitter freedom for slaves who wanted nothing more than their freedom and ability to work became a national tragedy. A major hall in the new Capitol building 200 years later provides a token of the respect and gratitude these slave laborers, never received.

NATIONAL PRESS BUILDING  
529 14TH STREET, N.W., SUITE 900  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20045  
(202) 783-6665  
(202) 783-5211 (FAX)

2136 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515  
(202) 225-8050  
(202) 225-9002 (FAX)  
(202) 225-1904 (TDD)  
www.house.gov/norton

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

2041 MARTIN L. KING AVENUE, S.E.  
SUITE 200  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20020-5734  
(202) 678-8900  
(202) 678-8844 (FAX)

Today little remains on Capitol Hill that bears the imprint of slave labor. Much of the carpentry work, including the mahogany, pine and walnut doors, was lost to fires, rebuilding and remodeling. History wiped away the work of these slaves without so much as a marker to indicate their contributions. The history of these slaves' contributions has been suppressed, even in official histories at the Capitol, until recent years. We are grateful for the bipartisan task force, of which Representative John Lewis is a member, established several years ago in anticipation of the recognition of the contributions of slave labor as envisioned by House Congressional Resolution 130.

In 1998, following the first shooting deaths of Capitol Police officers in the nation's history, I introduced H.R. 4347, the Jacob Joseph Chestnut-John Michael Gibson United States Capitol Visitor Center Act of 1998. The bill provided for enhanced security on the Capitol Grounds and for an appropriate place to welcome our constituents, taking into account their health and comfort. Nine years later, I have toured the graceful new addition to the Capitol, the Capitol Visitor Center. About 97% completed, finishing touches are in progress, such as the installation of bronze framework around the doors, and carpet installation, cafeteria counter tops, and millwork. Plaster and paint, along with a bronze handrail, are being applied to the three-level spiral stair case that will welcome visitors in elegant style to this outstanding facility.

The facility contains so much history and so many new amenities that it is nothing less than a premier new tourist destination that we in the District particularly welcome. The Congress and the nation depend on this city to be welcoming to constituents and to visitors from around the world. The District of Columbia is one of America's preeminent tourist destinations and consequently, there is a perfect synergy between what Congress and the District of Columbia want for tourists who come to the city to visit historic sites. City officials and I are working closely with Capitol officials on how to facilitate getting millions of visitors to this new venue that offers a modern setting in which to view the history of Congress and its contributions to our country. Included in this landmark building will be an exhibition gallery, a 550 seat cafeteria, gift shops, and visitor orientation theaters. At nearly 580,000 square feet, this project is the largest in the Capitol's 212 year history. No longer will visitors stand in long lines, and arrive in at the beginning of their Capitol tour tired, hungry, and often with little knowledge of what they are about to see. Not only will the new center provide greater security, but it will afford visitors an enjoyable and educational experience that would be incomplete if the untold story of the building of the Capitol remains untold.

Naming the great hall for the long unrecognized contributions of slaves will in some small way honor the importance of their contributions to their country and our determination to continue to erase the conditions that derive from that period in our history.

**Testimony by Representative Zach Wamp (TN)**  
**Before the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and**  
**Emergency Management**  
**September 25, 2007**

Madam Chair, Ranking Member Graves, Members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing on the renaming of what is currently known as the "Great Hall" in the Capitol Visitor Center. I appreciate your interest in this matter and look forward to working with you on this important initiative.

I want to give you a general outline on how this issue came about. This matter came to the Appropriations Committee's attention early in the Fiscal Year 2008 process when it became known that the AOC and others were calling this space, "The Great Hall." It is common sense that you cannot have two competing Great Halls, one in the CVC and one in the century old Library of Congress Jefferson Building, which are connected by a tunnel.

My Colleague Mr. Jackson, joined me in offering an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2008 Legislative Branch Appropriations bill during Committee markup that would accomplish the renaming. This provision was included in the House passed version of the bill. The Senate has yet to take up the bill.

It is clear that this committee should have a say on this matter that is why Representative Jackson and myself have introduced H.R. 3315. The support this legislation has received has been overwhelming, and the bill was introduced with over half of the House as cosponsors.

This grand hall is going to be the most prominent gathering space, outside of the rotunda, on the Capitol Grounds. The space needs a name that recognizes the importance and history of the Capitol.

In looking at the history of the Capitol, there is a glaring omission: to date there is no mention of the contributions slave labor made to the Capitol in the telling of its history or in the art work displayed. In fact, many people still do not know that it was slave labor that actually built this symbol of freedom. The time has come for us, the Congress of the United States of America, to realize the great opportunity we have before us. By naming this space Emancipation Hall we will finally honor those who have gone un-honored far too long.

Emancipation means free or equal. And there is no greater duty bestowed upon the Congress than to advance the principle of Freedom. Emancipation Hall will tell freedom's story to the millions of visitors every year. Like the Statue of Liberty, which stands tall in New York's harbor and represents the promise of Liberty, this hall will forever represent the promise of Freedom.

Thank you for your interest and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.